



# CREATING A NO DIG GARDEN



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# WHY DIG WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE TO?

INSTEAD OF DIGGING ORGANIC MATTER INTO YOUR GARDEN BEDS THE HARD WAY,  
GO NO-DIG & LET NATURE DO THE WORK FOR YOU.

## WHAT IS NO DIG?

No-Dig Gardening is basically a garden bed built on top of the ground made up of layers of organic matter that is brilliant to grow veggies and herbs in, while at the same time slowly breaking down into a nutrient-rich soil perfect for improving soils for further production. A simply fantastic solution for improving soils as it can be created on top of virtually any surface, including heavy clay, lawn, weeds, gravel, concrete, anything.

## THE METHOD

No-dig gardening is a bit like composting in that you are building up layers of carbon materials such as the dry matter like hay and higher nitrogen based organic matter such as green waste, manures, etc. As opposed to a compost heap, no-dig gardens also have thin layers (50mm) of completed compost between the layers of carbon (hay).

## WHAT TO USE?

You will need a good mixture of carbon materials in the form of hay or straw; old hay is often preferred as it is readily available and can be bought cheap. Additionally you need nitrogen components in the form of composted and / pelletised manures. It is often better to use organically certified pelletised manures as they usually have a known nutrient content and they have been ethically produced. Another fantastic ingredient for added success is Dolerite rock dust. This adds the essential alluvial component to an organic base and contributes benefits including some nutrient exchange and pH stabilisation. (This is often called 'Bluestone Crusher Dust' at your local landscape supplies store.)



NO-DIG GARDEN BEDS ARE EASY TO  
MAKE AND HIGHLY PRODUCTIVE





# HOW TO BUILD A NO DIG GARDEN BED

## STEP ONE

Mark out an area and if you prefer edge it with timber sleepers or bricks etc... If you don't have an edge don't worry, you can simply create a neat edge with twisted strands of moist hay. If you are building it on grass or weeds you will also need some pre-wetted newspaper to lay over the weeds to act as a sheet mulch to prevent the grass poking up through the beds later on. Whole newspapers are the way to go and use them opened up and overlap each by one third. It is essential to apply a light layer of compost and manure pellets underneath and on top of the newspaper to assist its eventual breakdown; by that stage the weeds have often died out completely.

## STEP TWO

Start by soaking hay (or straw or lucerne hay) in a garbage bin full of water, this is much more effective than wetting the straw later, saves water and really wets the ingredients properly. We prefer grass hay instead of straw or lucerne because it is inexpensive, readily available, composts faster and because it has other plants other than grass in its mix, it usually provides a greater range of nutrients than straw. As you take the wet hay out to build up your layers replace it with dry hay so you always have a good supply soaking as you go..

## STEP THREE

Spread your first layer of wet hay out evenly across your area to a depth of 100 to 150mm. Try and pull the hay apart as you go to 'fluff' it up to help the mixture aerate and avoid any dense clumps. If you don't have a border to your bed twist the wet hay strands into 'sausage' shaped lengths and lay them around the edge of the bed first before filling in the centre with the fluffed out hay. To avoid compaction and poor plant growth, make sure you don't stand on the bed after you make the layers.

## STEP FOUR

Next it's time to add a layer of nitrogenous organic matter. Chicken manure pellets are perfect because they have high amounts of nitrogen, which aid the breakdown of the high carbon materials, but most good farm manures or blood and bone is also fine. Around 100g (one and a half handfuls) per square metre of bed is fine.



## NO DIG INGREDIENTS:

- > HAY/STRAW
- > MANURE
- > COMPOST
- > DOLERITE ROCK DUST
- > WATER

## STEP FIVE

Next it's the rock dust layer, apply this evenly in a light sprinkle across the bed at 100g per square meter.

## STEP SIX

Now it's time for the compost, the best is a well made home compost, but if all else fails there are commercial composts available. Evenly sprinkle handfuls across the top until the straw is mostly covered, ideally to a depth of about 30 to 40 mm. It doesn't need to be too deep. Water this all in well. Moisture is important to activate the breaking down process.



## STEP SEVEN

Repeat steps 3-6 (ending with a hay layer) until you have the desired height. Usually 3-4 layers are plenty.

## STEP EIGHT

Now it's time to plant. Create a pocket to plant in by gently pushing your hand down through the layers separating as you go until you get to the base, the hole should be around 100mm wide. Fill this hole up with compost and plant your seedlings into that and water in well. As soon as the roots grow enough to reach the outside of the compost hole the layers should be sufficiently broken down for the roots to feed on and spread out into the wider surrounding area. No-dig gardens tend to be a few degrees above the existing soil temperatures in cold weather and a few degrees below in hot weather, so will moderate rapid temperature changes and provide ideal temperatures for growth.



GIVE IT A GO  
YOU'LL LOVE THE  
RESULTS

## NOTES FOR SUCCESS

Start with shallow rooting vegetables and herbs. Once the garden is more mature it is much easier to establish the deeper-rooted crops (like root vegetables) when the bed has broken down more.

If you wish, you can also supplement the no-dig beds with the addition of some sulphate of potash (potassium sulphate), around 50 to 80g per square meter, to provide the essential potassium required by plants for disease resistance and fruit production. Potassium can also be found in wood ash which is often available in the back yard garden, but be careful not to add too much as it tends to cake and it is also fairly alkaline, a light scatter over each layer is all that needs to be added, if at all.

Worms are an essential part of the no-dig garden, and will invade your new bed in the hundreds so you don't have to add them. They help to break down and aerate the layers and return nutrients back to the plants. As it does break down into a wonderful nutrient rich compost you can top it up as you go with fresh layers every 3 or so months, tucking the layer around your existing plants.. You also don't need to pull out any grass that you find sprouting, simply uproot it and turn it over so it too can break down and add to the nutrients and process.

## SO NOW YOU SEE.....

You can have your compost and eat from it too, with no-dig gardening a luscious garden of food plants can be yours with minimal inputs. What a way to go!

